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ILLINOIS

Moraine Hills

STATE PARK

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA
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CONSERVATION

THE PARK

Moraine Hills State Park is located in the northeast corner of Illinois, 3 miles south of McHenry, with the park entrance off of River Road. The Fox River runs through the western portion of the 1,690 acre park which consists of approximately 944 acres of upland and 746 acres of wetland, including 4 small lakes totaling 94 acres.

McHenry Dam controls the water level in the Chain O'Lakes and the adjoining lock operation allows pleasure boats and other craft to navigate around the dam and thus travel from Chain O'Lakes to Algonquin.

HISTORY

Artifacts found on the park property indicate that the presence of man in the area extends back to within 1,000 years of the retreat of the Wisconsin glacier. Seasonal habitation of the park area extends back to approximately 4,000 B.C. Indian tribes that occupied or at least passed through the area include the Potawatomi, Sauk, Fox and possibly the Miami and Winnebago. It was the Sauk and Fox tribes, who originally came from what is now Canada, that claimed ownership of the land at the time of white settlement in the area.

Horace Long was the first known white settler in the park area, having occupied a portion of what is now the southeast corner of the park before the original survey of 1833. Part of the stone foundation from his cabin still stands near the main park road.

The original dam was built at McHenry in 1907 and a hand operated lock was also constructed. The facilities were donated to the people of Illinois in 1924 and construction of a new concrete block dam was begun in 1934. In the early 1960's a portion of the park property on the west bank of the Fox River was given to the Division of Waterways for the lock and lock tender's building.

Major land acquisition of the Lake Defiance area began in 1971. After studying the resources and completion of a master management plan, construction of the park facilities began in the spring of 1975.

NATURAL FEATURES

The natural geology of the park property apparently resulted from the advance of the Wisconsin glacier about 15,000 years B.C. As the glacier retreated, it

left gravel rich deposits called kames which now make up the wooded hills and ridges scattered throughout the park. Lake Defiance was formed from a large ice block that separated from the glacier and was left to melt.

Smaller depressions resulted in the marsh and bog areas around the park.

The diverse geological character of the land created by the glacial action resulted in the development of many kinds of environments including rivers, lakes, marsh, prairie and woodlands. This enhanced a rich variety of plant and animal life which in turn attracted man.

Leatherleaf Bog: This 120 acre area represents an excellent example of kettle-moraine topography and supports very diverse plant communities. The bog itself consists of a large floating mat of sphagnum moss and leatherleaf surrounded by an open moat of water. Other plant species in this area include St. Johnswort, marsh fern, marsh marigold and several species of willow.

Pike Marsh: This area of approximately 115 acres lies in a peat-filled basin in the southeast portion of the park at the base of the Valporaiso moraine. The marsh features sharply contrasting plant communities with an outer zone of fen including such plants as Ohio goldenrod, Kalm's lobelia, dwarf birch, and hoary willow. The inner zone of marsh plants includes cattails and bulrushes. This area contains several rare plants and also supports the largest known colony of pitcher plants in Illinois.

Because of their natural significance, both the Pike Marsh and Leatherleaf Bog are dedicated nature preserves and are protected by law.

Wildlife: The diverse landscape provides habitat for numerous forms of wildlife. Over 100 species of birds have been identified. The area is heavily used by mallard, teal, wood duck, Canada geese and other migratory waterfowl. Many great blue heron and green heron utilize the marsh areas.

Various mammals including red fox, eastern cottontail, mink, oppossum, raccoon and white-tail deer can be seen in the upland timber stands of oak, hickory, ash, cherry, dogwood and hawthorn.

LAKE DEFIANCE

This small 48-acre lake is one of the few natural gla-

cial lakes in Illinois which has remained relatively undeveloped. It was probably much larger at one time but is gradually filling in with peat from the very unstable soils which surround the lake. The lake has maintained a near natural condition and supports a well-balanced fish population. In order to help preserve the lake in its natural state, and due to its small size and dangerous peat shoreline, bank fishing is prohibited. Boat fishing is allowed on a first-come first-served basis. Only electric trolling motors are allowed on this lake.

Ice fishing is permitted when safe conditions exist.

Picnicking: Tables are provided in a variety of open and shaded settings throughout the 10 major day use areas. Each area provides parking, drinking water and rustic comfort stations equipped with septic tanks. Picnic shelters are available at the Pike Marsh and Pine Hills Day Use Area. Flush toilet facilities are provided at the McHenry Dam concession building and the Park Office.

Concessions — Located at McHenry Dam and lower level of the Park Office building, the stands provide a variety of refreshments as well as bait and tackle. Boat and cross-country ski rentals are also available.

Playground: Children will find various playground equipment at the McHenry Dam area, and natural playground equipment at the Whitetail Prairie and Pike Marsh Day Use Areas.

Bicycling/Hiking: The 10.2 miles of bicycle/hiking trails make up one of the main recreational features of the park. The trails, surfaced with crushed limestone, meander throughout the park area and provide exceptional scenic and wildlife viewing opportunities.

Nature Trails — The Pike Marsh Nature Trail is 0.7 miles long. Besides the great variety of plant species found here, the marsh provides an excellent opportunity for viewing many marsh and woodland bird species. The highlight of this self-guiding trail is a 1,300-foot floating boardwalk which allows exploration of the different vegetative zones within the marsh community.

An interpretive boardwalk trail describing the unique features of Lake Defiance is 0.5 miles long. Access is available from the Park Office or Northern Lakes Day Use Area. Trail booklets for both Pike Marsh and Lake Defiance Nature Trails can be obtained at the Park Office.

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Boating: Because there are no launching facilities and parking is limited, no trailers are allowed in the park. Private boats may be brought into the park by car top only for use on the Fox River and the northern lakes. Rental boats are available at the McHenry Dam and Lake Defiance concession stands.

No private boats of any kind are allowed on Lake Defiance.

Fishing: Access to the Fox River is provided at the McHenry Dam area. A fishing pier accessible to handicapped visitors is located at the north end of the McHenry Dam area. The river offers a variety of fish including largemouth bass, northern pike, walleye, bluegill, crappie, yellow and white bass, channel catfish, bullhead, carp and yellow perch.

The northern lakes area — Wilderness and Tomahawk Lakes — provide access for bank fishing and carry-in car top boats (electric trolling motors only). The 26.6 combined acres offer the angler a good opportunity for catching largemouth bass, bluegill, green sunfish, and bullhead. Wilderness and Tomahawk Lakes are also stocked with northern pike, channel catfish, and largemouth bass.

Due to its small size, relatively undisturbed natural character and extremely unstable and dangerous peat soil shoreline, no bank fishing is allowed on Lake Defiance. Ten boats are available for public use on a first-come first-served basis. Please contact the park office for further information. Regulations for fishing on Lake Defiance and at the northern lakes are posted at the site.

A boardwalk trail provides access to the lake for visitors parking at the Lake Defiance Day Use Area.

Winter Sports: Ice Fishing is allowed on Lake Defiance, the northern lakes, and the Fox River. A one-way ski trail system has been developed using the 10.2 miles of bicycle/hiking trails. Cross-country skiers are urged to be aware of and to follow existing trail signs.

Interpretive Center: Located in the Park Office building, the center offers various displays as well as a slide show depicting the features of the park.

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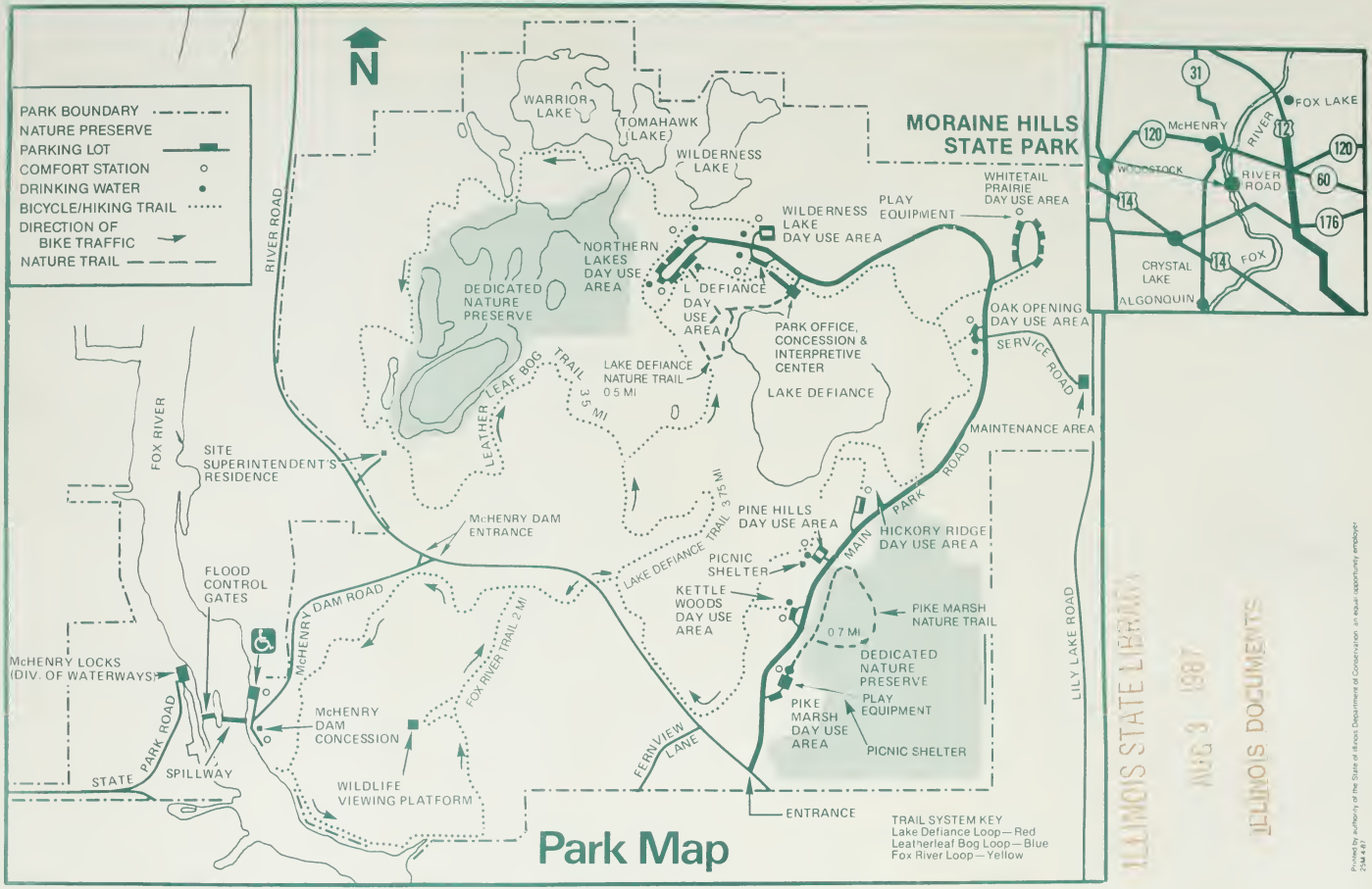

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FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Groups of 25 or more persons will not be admitted to any state park or conservation area unless permission from the site manager has been granted to use the facilities. In addition, groups of minors must have adequate supervision and at least one responsible adult must accompany each group of 15 minors. All pets must be on a leash.

Numerous recreation areas and historic sites are within easy access of every part of the state. Lodges, cabins and dining rooms are important features of Illinois Beach, Starved Rock, Pere Marquette and Giant City; White Pines Forest has cabins and dining rooms, and Black Hawk has dining rooms only. Reservations for lodging should be made with lodge managers.

All state parks are open the year round, except on Christmas Day and New Year's Day. When weather conditions necessitate the closing of park roads during freezing and thawing periods, access to park facilities is by foot only.

For more details about this site, contact Site Superintendent, 914 S. River Road, McHenry, Illinois 60050, phone 815/385-1624. For information on other sites, write the Illinois Department of Conservation 524 South Second Street, Springfield, Illinois 62706.